

Windmills in Lakenheath

During the 19th century five windmills stood in the village, probably all for corn milling or similar use (one is rather a mystery).

Mill Road (NGR TL 71868287)

The earliest of the mills, this first appears on Hodskinson's map of Suffolk, published in 1783 (surveyed 1778-82). The mill stood on a mound, which is usually an indication of an ancient site, and may be the site of previous mills known to have stood in the village since at least the 16th century. The last mill on the site was almost certainly a smock mill. The Bury and Norwich Post advertised it for sale on 21 August 1839, when, along with a nearly new house and three granaries, the proprietor Joseph Scott was selling "A Capital Tower Windmill, containing three floors, 2 pairs of stones and all the requisite going gears in excellent repair, capable of breaking 12 score of corn a week". No sale was forthcoming and on 4th September the same paper contained notice that the business had been transferred to his son, also Joseph.

This Joseph Scott is recorded in the 1841 census at the mill, aged 30. White's 1844 directory also lists him, as does the 1851 census, as "Miller & Merchant", born at Lakenheath. The tithe map and apportionment give Joseph as owner and occupier of "Mill" in 1850/3. Later directories list him as both miller and farmer and in 1858 White's directory has him as farmer, landowner and corn merchant (but not miller). However the 1868 Morris directory again gives Joseph Scott as miller, corn and seed merchant. Perhaps by this time business was prosperous enough to employ someone else to run the mill. The 1861 census gives Robert Dersley as miller at High Street and in 1871 James Bailey (41) was listed as journeyman miller (i.e. a paid miller) along with miller's boy Henry Bailey (14 - presumably his son). The Cambridge Independent Press recorded on 28th August 1875 that the mill had been bought for £300 by Mr. J. Burgess. In the 1881 census John Burgess (aged 56, from Mildenhall) is listed as miller and he also appears in directories in 1883, 1885 and 1888, as miller, using wind power. The last evidence for the mill's use in Kelly's 1892 when Cornelius Miller is listed using wind power. The 1901 OS map marks a circle at the site but does not name the mill, suggesting that it was down by this time, with perhaps only the base surviving. By the 1930's all traces of the mill seem to have gone, except the mound. At some time, perhaps the 1940's, (?) a small bungalow was constructed on the mill site. Several sheds also stand nearby, one of which appears to have been from the mill's time. Several 56lb ring weights survive by the house, one of which has the date 1805 painted on. Is this significant? When I visited in 1990 there was no one at home to ask.

"Claypits", or Undley Road Mill (NGR TL 70938174)

This mill first appears on Greenwood's map of Suffolk, published in 1824 (and surveyed 1823-4). No miller can be assigned to it until 1851, when the census gives James Trudgett (35, from Lakenheath) as miller, assisted by John Trudgett (16). Possibly the mill had been occupied by one of the other millers at first, so did not show up in the earlier directories or census. In 1854 the tithe map names James Trudgett as owner and occupier of "Mill & House" and in the 1858 directory he is given as miller & baker and beer retailer! In 1864 James is listed as farmer, with John as miller. The 1868 directory again has James as miller, but in the 1871 census he is again given as farmer, with James Trudgett (son?) aged 21 as miller. James died in 1877 and left the mill to his wife (will in Bury R.O.). The 1881 census lists John Trudgett as miller, by now aged 46 and he is listed in directories up to 1892, using wind power. In 1896 George Fincham is listed and the mill remained in his hands until the end.

In 1975 I spoke to Mr. Fincham (who was elderly and presumed to be the son of the first George) at the mill and he told me that the cap had been blown off in 1913, along with the sails. His memory would appear to have been a little out as the Bury Free Press of 2 January 1915 reads: "The violent storm which raged here on Monday night was responsible for a good deal of damage to the Undley windmill, the property of Mr. Geo. Fincham. The sails and the top were blown off and considerably damaged. Being in charge Mr. Herbert Rolph endeavoured to stop the mill when the storm broke but was unable to do so. He was about to leave the mill when the door was violently shut by the wind and he considers this saved his life as otherwise he would have been outside when the sails fell". So ended the mill's working life by wind but an oil engine was put in to work the stones and the tower was given a new roof. Work thus continued and the last directory entry would seem to be 1933 (still giving wind as power, however!). The mill is recorded as being out of use in the late 1930's and Mr. Fincham told me it stopped in the late 1930's. I understood that

it had been steam powered but he may have given me the wrong impression. He gave a good account of the mill as he remembered it. It was a small tarred brick tower mill, of three floors, with a domed cap, which was winded by tailpole and winch, in common with many local mills. The sails were shuttered patent sails and were carried on an iron windshaft. All the gearing was of wood and the sackhoist worked by friction from the underside of the waller. Two pairs of stones were fitted, one French and one grey and they were driven from below. The stone nuts were lifted out of gear and the engine drive came on to a cast tooth ring under the spur wheel. All this is typical of Fenland mills.

The mill was demolished after the war, and most of the ground floor walls could be seen in 1975. By 1990 much less remained but some walling can still be seen today.

Broom Road Mill (NGR TL 71918223)

This mill is not shown on the 1837 ordnance survey map, but in the Bury & Norwich Post of 14 February 1838 Charles Newdick was advertising for a journeyman miller at "Lakenheath Mill". A similar advert appeared on 10 October. The 1841 census records at "High Street" Charles Newdick, aged 30, as miller, assisted by George Wing (20), journeyman miller. White's directory of 1844 also lists him and in the 1851 census he is again recorded, aged 40 and born at Lakenheath. In the tithe map and apportionment (1850/3) Charles Newdick is named as owner and occupier of "Mill & Land". The map indicated the mill was of tower (or more likely, smock, type). By the 1861 census James Rutterford (31) is named as journeyman miller and in 1871 two millers are listed, in "Eriswell Road"; Elizabeth R. Williams (26, from Mildenhall) and James Holden (23, from Barnham, Norfolk). In the 1874 directory James Holden is given as miller but in the 1881 census James Rutterford (51, from Lakenheath) is again given as miller at "Back Road", assisted by William Rutterford (14) as miller's boy. The 1881 ordnance map shows the mill as being in use, but no miller is given in directories after this. Mr. Fincham (see above) told me in 1975 that one of the Eriswell Road mills was blown down. On the 1903 Ordnance map the mill is drawn as a circle, but is not named, implying only remains by then.

In 1990 I visited the site. The mill house and a small stone-built store building remained. The occupants told me their family acquired the property in 1919, the mill being gone by then. They understood the mill, along with others in the area, had been blown down about 1890 on "windy Sunday". Part of the mill survived (sounds like the brick base) until about the Great War, when it was pulled down and the bricks used to build one wall of a shed on the property. This wall is of yellow bricks, some of which have tar on one face, and from the extent the base could not have been very high. The tie beam in this shed is made from a common sail whip and scattered around the garden are several pieces of French stone.

Eriswell Road Mill (South) (NGR TL 721819)

Not much is known about this mill. It was not shown on the 1837 Ordnance survey map although the 1841 census lists Thomas Halls as miller at "High Street", aged 30. It is possible that he was at another mill however, given the vague address. The 1851 census is not much help either, giving Samuel Ruffel, (29, from Bardwell) as miller, also at "High Street". What is probably this mill is offered for sale in the Cambridge Chronicle of 31st January and 13th March 1852, described as a "newly erected brick and weatherboarded windmill". Directories in 1853 and 1858 list Josiah Halls as miller, grocer and draper. The tithe map does not cover the mill site, unfortunately. The 1861 census lists him at High Street (perhaps that is the shop address) as miller and grocer, aged 44 (born at Lakenheath). In 1868 he is listed as miller and shopkeeper and in the 1871 census as miller and farmer, this time in Eriswell Road. He was assisted by 15 year old Josiah Halls (son?). He is last listed in the 1874 directory and the 1881 census, now aged 64, and this time at High Street. The younger Josiah was still listed as miller in addition but no further record of the mill can be found. In the Cambridge Independent Press of 7th April 1877 Josiah Halls offered for sale his "tower windmill" and 6 acres of land. The 1881 ordnance map marks the mill as in use but by the 1903 revision it had gone. The site in 1990 appears to have given way to modern housing. The mill stood off the road, up a track. Some older houses remain on the main road. The mill is likely to have been a smock mill.

Albion Farm Mill, Sedge Fen (NGR TL 676847)

The 1880-1 Ordnance Survey map marks nothing at this site. The 1901 revision, however, marks Albion Farm, with "windmill (corn)" amongst its buildings. On the 25 inch scale map this shows up as a small circle adjacent to a barn. By the 1925 revision it had gone, the site being covered by farm buildings. In

1985 I visited the site and spoke to the occupiers. They had no idea that a windmill had ever stood there! Albion Farm was a typical late Victorian farmstead with a brick house and single storey weatherboarded buildings. There was no evidence of the former windmill and we can only guess at what it might have looked like. There were other farm mills in this period; one at Somersham and another near Whittlesea were smock mills; some mills in the Soham area had six small sails and another possibility is that it was a metal "wind engine". We shall probably never know.

Drainage Windmills

Five windmill pumps appear on maps; it is quite possible however that some at least were the same mill, moved from site to site, to accommodate modifications to the drainage pattern. Much information about these windmills probably awaits discovery in the papers of the drainage authority. All were probably large smock mills.

North Bank of Little Ouse (NGR TL670857)

This mill is first shown on Greenwood's map of Suffolk, surveyed in 1823-4. It also appears on Wells' map of the Bedford Level in 1829 and on the 1837 Ordnance Survey map. The Tithe map of 1854 is the last to record it, when the owners are given as Feltwell Drainage Commissioners and the occupier as Cyril King. The mill is drawn as a tower mill. It had gone by 1881.

Crosswater Mill - South Bank of Twelve Foot Drain (NGR TL 676856)

This was an old mill, first indicated on Hodskinson's map of Suffolk (surveyed 1778-82). The Commissioners of Lakenheath District insured with the Sun Fire Insurance Company on 22nd October 1784 "a water engine only situated at Cross Waters" for £250. Bryant's map of Suffolk (1826) names it "Crosswater Mill". It is last shown on the 1837 Ordnance Survey map and would appear to have been replaced by the steam pumping station, erected in 1844. This steam pump was itself replaced in 1926 by a diesel engine in a new pumphouse adjacent.

South side of Lakenheath Lode (NGR TL 673851)

This mill only appears on the Tithe map of 1854, when it was owned and occupied by the Brandon and Lark Commissioners. The map shows the mill with a rather strange symbol, rather as if the mill had been drawn in plan rather than the more common elevation. It had gone by 1881.

Great Fen Mill - South Side of Twelve Foot Drain (NGR TL 677855)

This mill first appears on the 1880-1 Ordnance Survey map. The daybooks of the Soham millwrights Hunt record work to this mill. In 1881 two sail whips were provided, each 36 feet long, with 7½ feet sail bars, mounted on a 50 foot back, for a total cost of £27-5-4½. These are big sails, of about 80 feet span, and give an idea of the scale of the mill. Another sail was fitted in 1883 and in 1907 Hunts were contracted to put on new sails and to repair the carcass of the "big mill" for £184. The mill was tarred. It probably went out of use soon afterwards and the 1927 Ordnance Survey map marks it as "disused". Two photographs of it, probably dating from the 1920's or 30's, show it with sails broken and the hoodway missing from the large scoop wheel. The cap was typical of Fen mills and was hand winded. The four sails were all common, or cloth spread. The mill had living accommodation within and a brick chimney could be seen emerging from the side about half way up. A picture of the mill, even more derelict by this time, was published in "Country Life" on 22nd February 1952 but it is not clear if the picture was contemporary, or taken earlier. At any rate, the mill was pulled down about this time. The foundations of the base and the scoopwheel culvert remain (filled with refuse) and are built of white brick, 25 feet across flats internally with 27 inch wide walls about 3 feet high.

Turf Fen Mill - South Side of Lakenheath Lode (NGR TL 691837)

Although not shown by Hodskinson in 1778-82, this mill was also insured by the Lakenheath Commissioners in 1784 (see above), also for £250. The first map to show it is Greenwood's (1823-4) and it is also missed by Faden in his map of Norfolk (1797). The Tithe map (1854) calls it "Turf Mill", owned by the executors of Thos. Rolfe and occupied by Edward Fincham. The 1880-1 and 1903 Ordnance Survey

maps both record it as being in use, and Hunt's account books record repairs to Lakenheath Little Fen Mill in 1883, costing £218-18-7. The 1927 OS map indicates a pumping station on the site and the remains of its foundations could be seen in the 1980's.